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IMPORTANT QUESTION CONSIDERED:

"For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?
Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

I N

A SERMON.

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Columbia, (S. C.) February, 1842.

S E R M O N.

“ For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?
Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? ”—*Matt.* 16c. 26.

The Psalmist, when contemplating the peculiar structure of the human frame, exclaimed, “ I am fearfully and wonderfully made ; ” and a careful survey of man as a mortal, yet immortal being, will convince us of the truth and propriety of the remark of the inspired Poet. Man is a complex being, possessing a body and a soul—consisting of matter and spirit. At the commencement of our existence these opposite qualities are combined in a mysterious union, and continue united, until death liberates the spirit from the body and dissolves the connection.

The body of man, as we all know, is mortal, and after a short existence, must die and return to its native dust. The soul is immortal, and can never die—and after its exit from the body, it must return to God, from whom it emanates, who will determine its eternal destiny.

The present life is therefore a scene of trial or probation, limited in its duration. Here our characters are forming for eternity, and our final destinies are involved in our deportment—in the disposition of mind which we cherish, and the objects which we pursue. This truth is asserted by the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, vi. 7, 8 ; where he remarks, “ Be not deceived : God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit, reap life everlasting.”

It is therefore our duty, as well as our highest interest, to turn away from the vanities and follies of the world—to

close our eyes upon its fascinations and its allurements, and seek above all things, the salvation of our souls. Religion is of paramount importance to every other consideration, because it alone can secure that which of all things is of the greatest moment—the salvation of the soul. The world, with all its boasted honors and enjoyments, is a mere deception—its joys and pleasures are but illusive dreams—its highest honors empty breath—its riches shining dust, as evanescent as the morning cloud—and its best and most valued enjoyments dissipate and delude the mind, but cannot satisfy it. The largest and most extensive earthly portion is lighter than vanity, and he, who in the pursuit of worldly good sacrifices his immortal soul, will find by sad experience, how utterly valueless and insignificant are earth's best gifts, when compared with the transcendent worth of an immortal spirit. This is evidently the leading sentiment brought to view in the text, and our blessed Saviour, in order to impress the mind with a sense of its weighty importance, expressed in the form of an interrogatory. In this way, the truth which he wished to inculcate is brought more clearly and fully to view :

"For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?"

These solemn and deeply impressive words suggest to our minds three propositions, to which we invite your serious and prayerful attention—and we humbly pray, that the spirit of grace and truth may enlighten our minds and suitably affect our hearts whilst we are engaged in their consideration. The propositions are as follows:—1st. We possess immortal souls of infinite value. 2d. Our souls are in imminent danger of being lost. 3d. Nothing can compensate us for the loss of the soul.

I. WE POSSESS IMMORTAL SOULS OF INCALCULABLE VALUE. That man is possessed of an immortal soul, is truth which may be established both by reason and by Scripture. Many of the Heathen Philosophers, among whom were Pythagoras, Plato, and others, firmly believed in the doctrine, that an immaterial and immortal principle is connected with the body. It is true the opinions that they entertained in reference to the powers of the soul, and its condition after death, were vague, uncertain and very erroneous. Notwithstanding they were destitute of the light of Revelation, yet by the exercise of reason alone, they were enabled to perceive that man was endowed with a nature which was not material, and which in many respects was separate from and independent of the body. And the least consideration will convince us, that this opinion was not erroneous. We have the evidence of this truth in our powers of thought, memory and retrospection, and in those

ardent aspirations after something enduring and immaterial, which we constantly cherish. The Bible accords with our own experience and reason, upon this subject, and whilst it establishes the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, it would also teach us its immense value.

In the book of Job, [32d and 8th,] it is positively asserted, that "there is a spirit in man ; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." In the Prophecy of Zacharia it is said—the "Lord formeth the spirit of man within him." In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which is recorded in the 10th chapter of Luke, we are taught most clearly and fully the doctrine of the immateriality and immortality of the soul, and its susceptibility of suffering or enjoyment in another world. But as we have already observed, we are led to infer from the teachings of God's word, that the value of the soul is incomparable, and this will appear when we consider—

1. *The nature of its powers.*—The soul of man was not, like his body, created from a material substance, but is the immediate offspring of God himself, and was the last and most glorious exercise of his creative power. It was made as the fairest and most perfect likeness of himself, and was intended to reflect the image of his own immortality, and the beauty and perfection of his own God-like nature. The inspired historian in writing an account of the creation of man says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." The image of God was imparted to the soul of man, so that in its moral perfections, as well as in its powers of action, it bore a strong resemblance to the Deity himself. The soul thus constituted is possessed of the most noble and capacious faculties. The human mind defies all description. It comprehends in its grasp ten thousand visible objects. It can investigate the most intricate and abstruse subjects. Its powers of invention know no limits—it penetrates into the bowels of the earth or the dark caverns of the sea. Oceans and rivers cannot confine it—mountains form no barrier against its wanderings—the air, the earth, the sea, the sky, are all the subjects of its survey and investigation. And as if the material world were too finite and contracted for its operations, it rushes into futurity and contemplates the character and perfections of the great Jehovah, and grasps the unseen realities of the world to come. If we look too, at the powers of *volition* which the soul possesses, its capability to determine its own actions and to direct and control its operations : If we further consider the passions of the soul—those emotions of love, hope, fear, joy, sorrow, which it exercises, we will readily see, that a spirit of such vast and unlimited capacities, and capable of experiencing such exqui-

site happiness or misery must be inestimable in its value.—The great worth of the soul appears—

2. *From the price paid for its Redemption.*—It is common for man to estimate the value of every thing, by the price which has been paid for it, or by the labor and pains-taking which were necessary to its possession. That which is obtained without labor or some pecuniary consideration, is held in very low estimation, whilst that which has been obtained at a great expense of money, or time or labor, or all of these combined, is highly prized.

By the same rule of judgment, we should form our opinion of the value of the soul. It has been bought with a price *adequate* to its value. Neither more nor less has been paid for its redemption than it is intrinsically worth. And what is the price at which it has been purchased? Let the inspired volume speak upon this subject.—“For we are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” Here then, we have stated the equivalent which has been given for the human soul—not silver and gold, but the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Neither gold nor silver, nor earth’s costliest and most precious gems were adequate to the redemption of the soul—nothing could be found of sufficient worth to secure its ransom, but the blood of the Son of God.

Look at the exalted dignity of Christ’s nature and person—remember that he was the son of God—that in his divine nature he was essential God—that all things were made by Him, and without him was not any thing made, that is made—that he was “the brightness of his father’s glory, and the express image of his person, and upheld all things by the word of his power. Yet this exalted being, so glorious in his nature, so dignified in his character, being “God over all, blessed forever more,” became our surety and in his own person suffered the punishment due to sin, that he might rescue our souls from eternal death. “He loved us and gave himself for us”—he assumed our nature, became “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” died for our sins, rose again for our justification, and is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as our advocate with the Father.

Would you learn the value of the soul? Go to the manger in Bethlehem, and see the son of God wrapped in swaddling clothes, and suffering the deepest humiliation of which human nature is capable, destitute of the commonest comforts and necessities of life, and exposed to every indignity. Oh! the infinite condescension of the son of God. No wonder that a scene like this should awaken the astonishment and call forth the sympathies of the bright inhabitants of Heaven! Would you know the value of the soul? Follow this immaculate

Saviour of the world in all his wanderings—witness his poverty and want—listen to the humiliating confession which he made: “The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Go with him to the garden of Gathsemene, see him as he lay upon the cold earth, with the dews of Heaven falling upon him, deserted by man, and apparently forsaken by his God—with no kind friend to impart a word of comfort or consolation to his oppressed and wounded spirit, and whilst in the agony of his soul he sweats great drops of blood—hear, oh ! hear, the deep but submissive supplications of his heart—“Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will, thine be done!”

Would you form some idea of the immense value of your undying spirit? Go with the Saviour to Pilate’s judgment hall, behold the cruel mockings and buffettings which he endured—follow him to Calvary, see him nailed to the cross—see how the blood trickles from his hands, his feet, his head, his side—listen to his agonizing cry, “my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,”—he bows his head and dies, exclaiming, “It is finished !” Here, in these mournful and truly affecting scenes, you may learn this solemn truth—“the redemption of the soul is precious.”

We may further learn the great worth of the Soul—

3. *From the efforts which are made for its possession.* Its salvation is desired by its benevolent Author. To secure its happiness he has sent his Son, to make an atonement for its sins, to shed his blood for its redemption, and to provide the means for its recovery from the guilt and pollution of sin, and from the power of Satan. Still further, to promote its well being in time and in eternity—the spirit of grace and truth has been sent to enlighten it—to convince it of sin, righteousness, and judgment—to renew and sanctify it and to prepare it for the glory and happiness of Heaven. It was with a view that it might be instructed and made acquainted with the way of life, that the Bible has been given to man, and the ministry of reconciliation established. So deeply solicitous is God for its salvation, that nothing has been left undone which was necessary to promote its well-being. All has been done, which the goodness and mercy of God could do, consistent with his justice to render its felicity certain. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, are all equally engaged in efforts to save it. Angels in Heaven are watching over its interests with the most intense solicitude, and we are told that so great is the concern which they feel in the happiness of our race, that they rejoice with exceeding great joy when one sinner repenteth. The Church in Heaven and the Church on earth are both engaged in efforts for the conversion of the soul, and

its final and complete deliverance from the power of Satan and sin.

But whilst efforts are making for its happiness and salvation, efforts are also being made for its destruction. Whilst Heaven is stooping to give it life, Hell is moving to work its death. Satan, the sworn enemy of our race, is engaged in the most powerful and systematic effort to lead away the soul from the service of God, and to drag it down to the chambers of eternal night and sorrow. By his evil suggestions—by his multifarious and powerful temptations, aided by the seductive charms of a corrupt world, which he sways and governs at his will, he seeks to destroy the happiness of man, and thus frustrate the benevolent purposes of Jehovah.

If the Soul is the object of such contest between the powers of light and the powers of darkness—if such untiring and vigorous exertions are made for its safety on the one hand, and its destruction on the other, surely it must be of incomparable worth.

The value of the soul will be further seen—

4. *When we reflect upon the duration of its Existence.*—The body of man is mortal and must see corruption—it is perishable in its very nature, and how blooming and beautiful soever it may appear,—how full soever of strength and activity, it must like the flower of the field, soon fade and die.

The soul is however immortal in its nature, and can never become extinct. Emanating as it does from the great Jehovah himself, it can know no termination to its being, so long as the unchangeable and eternal Creator shall continue to exist. The present life, therefore, is only the commencement of its being. It now exists in time, but when it shall have dissolved its connection with the body—when the spirit shall have left its house of clay—when it shall have cast off the chains which bind it to earth, and shall have been freed from the prison in which it has long been confined, it will then exist in *Eternity*, and be clothed upon with immortality.

But the eternal existence of the soul, will not necessarily be in a state of happiness. Its future life may be one of unmixed enjoyment, or it may be one of unmitigated suffering—and it is this reflection which throws so much deep and absorbing interest around the future destiny of man. He may be forever happy with God, enjoying the presence and smiles of his Saviour, associated with the pure and bright inhabitants of Heaven, progressing in knowledge and holiness, and increasing in felicity as he becomes assimilated to God—or he may be consigned to the dark regions of despair, where, shut out from the light of Heaven, removed far, far beyond the reach of God's grace and mercy, he will drag out a

miserable and hopeless existence. Who then can duly estimate the worth of a single soul—undying in its nature, and capable of endless suffering in hell, or everlasting happiness in heaven? Who can compute the value of that rich treasure which has been deposited in these earthen vessels? In time its intrinsic worth cannot be known—it can only be ascertained when flesh and spirit shall have failed, and when the veil, which hides the eternal world from our vision, shall have been drawn aside. This much we can know, that its salvation is of more importance than the whole world—and its destruction or loss is the most dreadful event that can possibly be conceived. Do we wish to ascertain the worth of the soul?

“Then let us gather round the Cross
That knowledge to obtain,
Not by the Soul’s eternal loss—
But everlasting gain.”

This brings us to the second part of our subject, in which we propose to show—

II. THAT OUR SOULS ARE IN IMMINENT DANGER OF BEING LOST.—By the loss of the Soul we do not understand the extinction of its being—for the soul is immortal and can never cease to exist. By the loss of the soul, we understand its exclusion from Heaven—its separation from God, and all those sources of enjoyment which are necessary to its happiness, and the endless punishment which it will experience, as the just demerit of sin. The danger of thus losing the soul, is supposed in the text and proved by innumerable existing facts.

1. *The loss of the Soul is certainly possible.*—This truth needs scarcely any elucidation. All men have sinned, and as a necessary consequence, they have exposed themselves to the punishment due to sin. “The wages of sin is death.” The punishment which God has determined to inflict upon all the impenitent is plainly and fully declared, and we are assured that “he that believeth not the Son is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him.” We are informed in the word of God, that unless we *repent* and *believe*, we must be damned. It is positively declared by our Saviour himself, that except we become renewed in the spirit of our minds—except we are “born again,” we cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

These assurances of Scripture certainly lead us to infer that the loss of the soul is possible, or that we are in imminent danger of being excluded from the Kingdom of God. And this truth will be the more apparent when we reflect, that those moral qualifications, which the Gospel prescribes, as being

necessary to our admittance into Heaven, are such as man by nature does not possess, and which cannot be obtained but by the subjugation of those passions and dispositions, which the natural heart delights most to cherish, and the cultivation of those affections and principles to which it is most hostile.

It requires no very labored argument to show, how exceedingly difficult it is to induce men to break off from their evil habits, and to practice those christian duties which the Gospel enjoins. No truth is more evident than this "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be." There is in man a strong propensity to that which is evil, and an aversion equally strong, to that which is good and holy—so that with all the exertions which can be made to induce man to become religious, in many cases, our best directed efforts prove in vain.

When we remember too, that in addition to man's natural propensity to sin, he is surrounded by temptations the most numerous and powerful—that the inventive genius of Devils and wicked men, is constantly employed in framing new schemes for his seduction from the path of virtue, it is certainly not to be wondered at, that so many are overcome by the force of temptation, and become the victims of their own folly. Our world is one grand theatre of display. Every thing is set out before us, which can possibly gratify the eye or delight the heart. There is no passion in our nature, but what may be fully gratified. The halls of banqueting and mirth, vocal with all the charms of music and of song, invites us to its revelry—the fashions of the world offer every means for the gratification of our vanity—honor and fame afford us the opportunity to satisfy the most enlarged ambition. Wealth will minister to our avarice, and the most brutal and sensual passions of the heart can find objects from which they may derive enjoyment. Satan, the world, and man's own heart, are all combined in working his destruction—and their united efforts place his soul in circumstances of the greatest peril. And we would ask, if these considerations do not render it not only *possible*, but also *highly probable*, that the soul may be lost?

This position will be strengthened, when we reflect, how generally the means of grace are neglected—what efforts are made to resist the influences of the Spirit, and in short, what little disposition is manifested, to fall in with the benevolent purposes which God cherishes towards man. This condition is truly dangerous, and will certainly lead to the most awful consequences. "The end of these things is death."

2. *The loss of the Soul is utterly irreparable.*—Many things may be lost in this life, which can be recovered again; and even if they are not, their loss does not necessarily destroy our peace, and may not endanger our future happiness.

An individual may lose his property—his dwelling may be consumed by fire—but by patient and persevering effort, he may acquire the means for repairing this injury. A man may lose his fortune, either by speculation or by the fraud and dishonesty of his supposed friends,—but by prudence, economy and good management, he may again acquire wealth, and place himself in circumstances beyond the reach of want. A man's health may be impaired—uiroads may be made upon his constitution—his strength may fail, and disease may for a while prey upon his system—medical skill may however, conquer disease, restore health to the functions, and he who was pallid and helpless, may again walk forth in all the vigour and activity of life. A man may, by improper conduct, injure his reputation; his character may be sullied by crime, but there may be some redeeming qualities in his nature which, by being cherished and brought into exercise, may free him from the infamy which his improper conduct may have brought upon him, and he may become established in the confidence and respect of his fellow-citizens.

The loss of the soul, however, can never be repaired. This is an evil for which there is no remedy. The loss of the soul is *total* and *irrecoverable*,—and this is plain from the fact, that the present is the only state of probation, which has been provided for man. Now only can he seek the favor of God—the forgiveness of sin, and a hope of Heaven. Now only he enjoys the means of grace—the word of God, the ministry of reconciliation, and the influences of the Holy Spirit. If these do not prove effectual in his conversion and salvation, no means will be provided for him beyond the grave, and to the destiny which he has chosen—he will be left without a remedy.—“*Everlasting punishment*, admits of no *cessation*, nor affords any *hope*.” “What shall a man then give in exchange for his soul?”—or rather, we should ask, what would a man not be willing to give, to escape the misery of Hell and the bitter pains of the second death? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? What price would be regarded too great, for a cessation of his punishment, or a mitigation of his woe! But it will then be too late to talk about exchanges, or to make any efforts to repair the injury which we have sustained. The destiny of the soul will then be fixed without the possibility of a change, and the smoke of its torment will ascend up forever and forever.

We come now to notice briefly the last proposition, which is:

III. THAT NOTHING CAN COMPENSATE FOR THE LOSS OF THE SOUL.—This will be seen from a careful consideration—

1. *Of the case supposed.*—“If he gain the whole world.” You will perceive that our Saviour bases his whole argument, not upon any fact, or any case that has ever existed, or which

ever can exist, but upon a mere supposition, that is in itself altogether impossible. His object evidently was, to teach this doctrine, that no amount of earthly good can compensate for the loss of the soul, and that its value cannot be computed. He would seem to challenge us to exercise our fancies in depicting the pleasures of the world in their most delightful aspect—in placing the highest possible value upon the glories and honors of the world, and in trying to convince ourselves that its wealth can be made conducive to our greatest enjoyment. We may then imagine, that we possess the whole territory of the globe—that its treasures are at our command, that we hold the reigns of undisputed empire, and controul the temporal destinies of the world—and then he suggests to us the question, what shall a man gain, in the acquisition of all this worldly good, if after all he lose his soul?

As we have remarked, this is a mere supposition, which never did exist in fact, nor is it possible. Some men have gained much of the world, much of its wealth, much of its honor and distinction—some have extended their conquests over large portions of the globe, and made many tribes and nations subservient to their will; but no one ever conquered the *whole* world; no one ever possessed all that this world, insignificant as is the place which it occupies in the universe, can afford. The most renowned conquerors, who have been most signally successful in extending their conquests, have subjugated but a limited portion of the world. The worldly acquisition of men, whether we regard wealth or honor, or fame, or pleasure, or power, or territory, are necessarily very limited. But even admitting that the supposition might be realized, we return—

2. *To the Inquiry proposed.*—“What is a man profited, &c. &c.” The world is evidently *defective* in its possessions, unsatisfying in its nature, and transient in its continuance. Suppose then you gain the whole world—come and let us enquire what you are profited. All its lands are yours, you can dispose of them at your will: its honors and titles are at your control, you can confer them upon whom you please: you can dethrone kings, subvert empires, change governments, and enact laws for the regulation of your subjects: wealth flows into your coffers, pleasure ministers to your appetites; every thing which you see is yours—but, your lands you must leave; your power to confer titles and regulate governments must cease; death will come and remove you from wealth—pleasure will cease to charm, honor and fame will fail to invite your arms; every avenue to sensual enjoyment will be closed by death, and the vanities of time be swallowed up by the realities of eternity! Now the scene changes—follow the soul to the bar of God.—In this life it had gained the

world and gratified its most enlarged desires ; it is now condemned by the Creator to an eternal separation from his presence ; it departs from Heaven and sinks to Hell. That soul which once possessed the world, and knew no control, is chained in the fetters of eternal night ; it has exchanged its glory for disgrace ; its freedom for slavery—the wealth, pomp, show and pleasure of the world, for what ? For the endless torments of the damned ! There is no profit surely in bartering an immortal soul for such a portion as this.

Lastly, we notice :

3. *The Exchange proposed.*—“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?” Some are bartering their souls now for a very small and poor equivalent. But what think you a soul in Hell would give to exchange its condition, if such an exchange were possible ? Think you a thousand worlds, such as ours, would be considered too much, if they might purchase its freedom and ensure its happiness ? I trow not !—But my friends, think you that all the fame which has ever been acquired ; all the wealth that has ever been possessed, and all the pleasure that has ever been enjoyed ; think you that all these put together, would be withheld, if by their relinquishment, the torments of Hell might be escaped ? Go and ask the unhappy inmates of that gloomy abode, and they will answer you, in language which you cannot misunderstand.

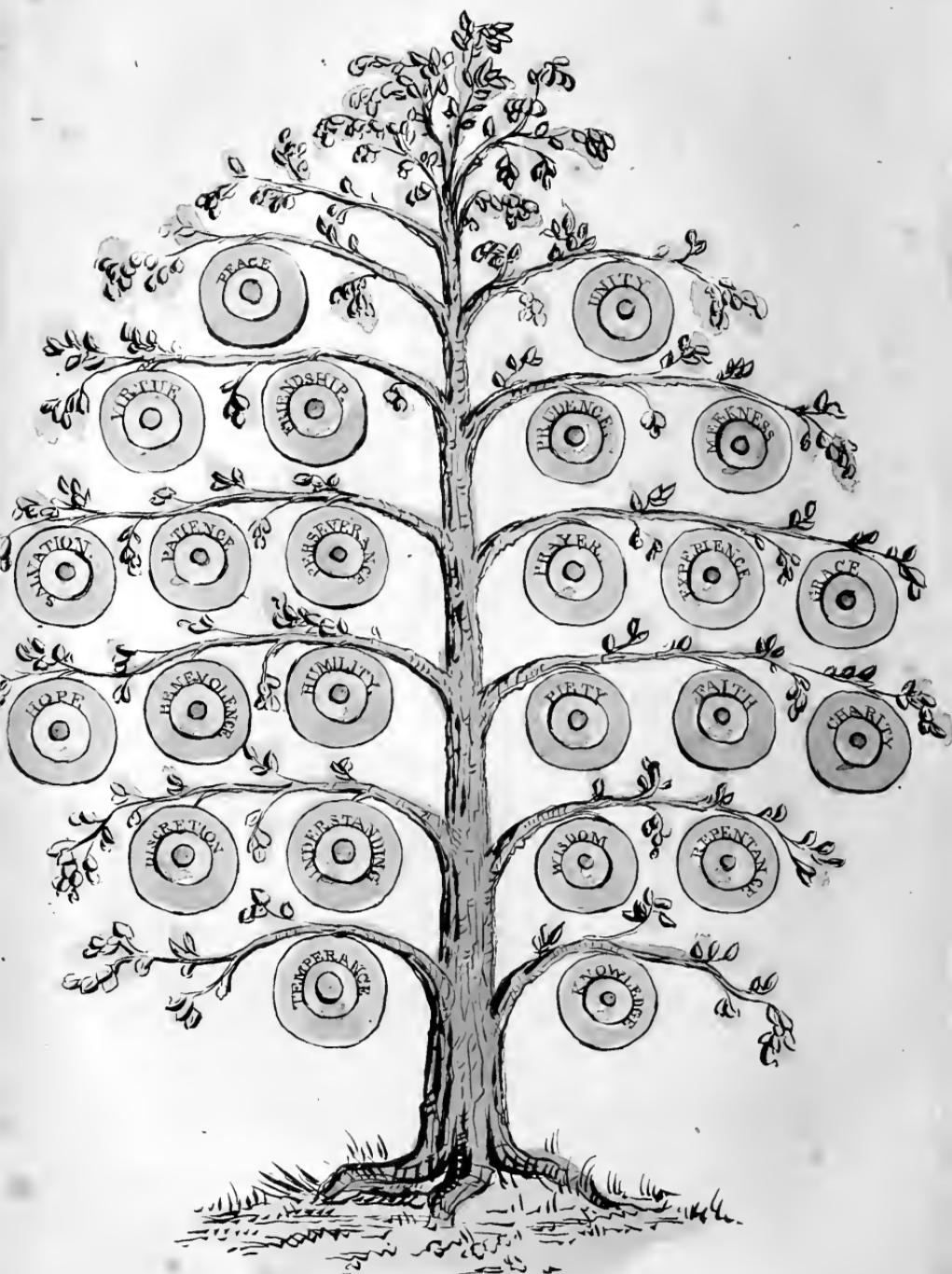
For what then are you now exchanging the salvation of your soul ? Some are selling their souls for a very trifling consideration indeed. Perhaps the gratification of a single passion, the indulgence of a single appetite, may be all the equivalent which many of you will receive in exchange for the loss of your undying spirits. Some will follow the fashions and pomps of the world ; some will yield to a spirit of ambition or avarice, or pride—some will indulge in the intoxicating bowl ; some will seek the gratification of their animal passions—in some, or all of these ways, and for some of these trifling considerations, men are selling their present happiness and their future felicity.

Behold then, my friends, the folly of preferring the world to Religion ! After gaining the world, it will vanish from your grasp, and you cannot, if you would, retain its possession. With it, you cannot purchase an exemption from death, and it will not avail to shorten the duration nor mitigate the anguish of the punishment which you must experience beyond the grave.

Learn wisdom then betimes—the world passeth away and the fashion thereof—every thing earthly is evanescent and unsatisfying.—Religion only will endure, when the world shall have passed away and all finite objects shall have forever

vanished. Duty and interest admonish us to despise the world—to lift our thoughts and affections above, and seek in the favor of God and the hope of Heaven, a treasure that will constitute us rich and happy here, and which will endure long after the ravages of time shall have ceased to exert their desolating effects upon finite and terrestrial objects.—AMEN.





TREE OF LIFE .

THE TREE OF LIFE.

The Tree of Life, stood in the garden of Eden; in the day of Adam was budding to blossom, the leaves thereof preserved man in innocence, but not in sin; therefore man was driven from it. Gens. 3: 22—24. In the day of King Solomon, and Ezekiel the Prophet, this Tree appeared to them with fruit, that was sweet and valuable. Song 2: 3. Ez. 47: 12. But in the day of St. John and St. Paul, this fruit came to full perfection. The leaves and fruit invaluable. Rev. 22: 23. Philip. 3: 8. Whosoever looks on this Tree, and the fruit thereon, may consider the twenty four Elders in the Temple, before the Throne of God and the Lamb. Whosoever hath received this fruit from the Lamb in the midst of the Throne, and eaten them, hath skill enough to take twelve of these fruits for the gates; and the other twelve for the foundation of the Temple of God; will never more plead the Saint, or christian can, or may finally fall from saving Grace and eternally perish.—Rev. 7: 17.
